



**Connecticut Department of Public Health**

**Testimony Presented Before the Public Health Committee**

**February 24, 2016**

**Commissioner Raul Pino, M.D., M.P.H.  
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**House Bill 5350 - An Act Concerning the Department of Public Health's Recommendations on  
Fluoridation of the Public Water Supply**

The Department of Public Health (DPH) supports House Bill 5350, and would like to provide the following information regarding the Department's bill.

The proposed language in this bill will revise the mandated amount of fluoride added to the public water supply to align with the most recent recommendations of the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) for optimal fluoride levels in drinking water to prevent tooth decay. In addition, the bill revises section 19a-38 to remove the range of fluoride that was set in 1965 and amends it to mandate the water companies to add not more than one-tenth of a milligram per liter different than the Department of Health and Human Services recommendations.

Dental caries, a disease that causes tooth decay (cavities), is a chronic, progressive, transmissible, bacterial, infectious disease that is almost always preventable. Tooth decay is the most common chronic disease in children, almost 5 times more common than asthma. If left untreated, tooth decay can lead to pain, infection, and tooth loss, and can impact an individual's ability to eat nutritious meals, ability to speak clearly, concentrate in school and work, affect employment opportunities, limit self-esteem and social interactions, and have a negative impact on overall health and quality of life.

Fluoride is a mineral that exists naturally in water, but usually not at the level to prevent tooth decay. Fluoridation is the process of adding small amounts of fluoride to public water supplies to reach the optimal level of fluoridation to prevent tooth decay. Fluoride protects teeth from cavities in two ways. 1) When bacteria in the mouth combine with sugars from foods and beverages, an acid is produced that can erode tooth enamel and demineralize (damage) teeth. Fluoride makes the tooth structure stronger, so teeth are more resistant to the acid attacks that cause demineralization. 2) If teeth have already been damaged by acid, fluoride accumulates in the demineralized areas and begins strengthening the enamel - a process called re-mineralization. Although there have been tremendous gains made in the reduction of dental caries due to fluoridation, tooth decay remains a significant public health issue in Connecticut.

In 1962, the US Department of Health and Human Services issued a Public Health Service (PHS) recommendation regarding optimal fluoride concentrations in drinking water for community water systems. Fluoridation in Connecticut began on a statewide level in 1965, with the enactment of Section 19a-38 of the Connecticut General Statutes, which requires public water systems that serve 20,000 or more persons to maintain their water with a fluoride content of between 0.8mg/L to 1.2 mg/L. Today,

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91% of CT residents on public water systems have access to the benefits of fluoridated water in the prevention of tooth decay. A HHS panel was convened in 2010 to review the 1962 recommendation. This panel assessed the best available science and concluded that community water fluoridation remains an effective public health strategy beyond that provided by other fluoride products. In April 2015, HHS issued a new recommendation, based on the panel report, to update and replace the 1962 recommendation. The new recommendation of 0.7mg/L replaces the range of 0.7 mg/L to 1.2 mg/L. Therefore, revising Section 19a-38 of the CT General Statutes reflects this new recommendation.

Fluoridation is endorsed by leading scientific, public health, medical and dental stakeholders. More than 3,000 studies or research papers have been published on the subject of fluoridation. The overwhelming weight of the evidence, plus more than 65 years of experience, supports community water fluoridation as a proven, safe, and effective way to prevent decay. Community water fluoridation is the most practical, cost-effective, equitable and safe measure to ensure all members of the community have access to fluoride regardless of age, education, income or access to routine dental care.

The Department would like to thank the committee for raising the Department's bill.